

Analogue

850 words

ted.gross@comcast.net

I had to get out of town for a while. I thought of Vegas, but figured put a little more distance on the situation.

So I'm on a Greyhound headed to Chicago--the experience not quite as terrible as I anticipated, mainly because the snow in the Sierras was beautiful.

The Bingham, Nevada part happened because someone up front got sick. The driver pulls over, the sick gal rallies and we're back on the road, but no it turns into a medical emergency and the guy swings into the left lane, guns the shit out of it and we pull into Bingham and there's an ambulance and an announcement there'd be a delay.

So we all get off but I walk a little too far and the bus is gone.

I see they got a Super 8, which I like, and the cab driver is friendly and candid and I'm getting a feel of the town, and a couple days turned into a month.

So I'm in the main lounge of The Palermo, enjoying

the 3rd set from Luella and the Capris. Terri (Luella) thanks everyone and soon is back in the bar in jeans and sweatshirt, along with the drummer.

“You sat through it again,” she said. “Did I maintain my standard?”

I said no complaints--which was true, she really could turn on Karen Carpenter to a tee--but what about the backstory?

“What about it?”

“Ah sorry.”

“I’m kidding,” she said. “There’s breaks in this business, there’s luck, timing. Who you sleep with.”

I’m thinking maybe too much information now.

“In my particular case,” Terri continued, “I did have a recording deal once. Capitol Records, the old round tower building you still see from the 101? . . . Re-hab got in the way.”

Nothing screamed she was an addict, but it didn’t add up having all this talent playing towns most people never heard of.

“What’s yours?” she said.

I should have had a standard answer prepared, but no one asked me that yet in Bingham. Other than how’s your day going, and having any luck at the tables?

I said, “I don’t *have* a good backstory. I’m trying to reinvent myself.”

“From what?”

“Well first thing I guess, from living in New Jersey.”

“What part?” the drummer-guy said, the first time he’d opened his mouth.

“Teaneck . . . are you from back there too?”

“Down the shore, yeah. Not *from* there, but spent a lot of years . . . You remember when AC first opened?”

I didn’t exactly but I nodded yeah.

“Those days,” the guy said, “the music business, you had the Philly New York AC triangle . . . All dried up pretty much.”

“You wouldn’t know it by looking at him,” Terri said, “but Carl played with some big names. Michael Jackson, for one.”

“Holy Mackerel.”

“Not with him,” Carl the drummer said. “Everything was overdubbed. I never met the man.”

I said Jeez, I’m in rarefied company here, I’m not kidding.

“What’d you do in Teaneck?” Terri said.

“Okay not interesting about me,” I said.

“I get where he’s coming from,” Carl said.

Terri said, “Well are you passing through then, you live here, what?”

I said I’m running.

“Now that’s an unsatisfying answer,” she said. “No depth at all.”

“It’s a good answer,” Carl said. “Let’s play some cards.”

When I saw Terri and Carl in action at the blackjack tables, more of the backstory fell into place. I hoped I was wrong, but they looked like a couple degenerate gamblers. And the free drinks were flowing liberally and Terri and Carl didn’t miss any rotations.

I’m thinking this is how it worked, didn’t it, they’d gamble their whole paychecks. Start all over the next day . . . or week, or month . . . and they were playing badly, hitting on 13 when the dealer had a 4 showing, I mean at least get a chart on basic strategy, give yourself a fighting chance.

After a while they’d both bought more chips, never a good sign, and I cashed in the 20 dollars I’d been pushing around and headed across the parking lot to my room at the Quality Inn.

Which I’d moved to from the Super 8 since it was closer to the action.

Carl followed me out there, was a bad drunk it turned out, instructed me not to cozy up to Terri any more. He pushed me into a parked car and then one of those posts that holds up the second story walkway of the motel. The night desk person came out, said should he call the cops, I said don't worry about it, and Carl went back in the casino.

In the morning Terri and Carl were both in the breakfast buffet. Carl gave me a thumbs-up from their booth, and I gave him one back.

Didn't use to work that way though, might not still. If this guy really did play with Michael Jackson, maybe you cut him a break. You check.